

Hurricane Sandy: Short-Term Citizen-Based Communication and Aid Mobilization

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Research Team

- Interdisciplinary
- Emergency Management, Hazards
- Political Science/Public Policy/Risk Analysis
- Communications, Civilian Organizations in Disasters (e.g. Katrina)

Introduction

- Examine phenomenon and scale of ad-hoc, local, citizen-based disaster communication, decision-making, and aid mobilization

Disaster Research Center 2x2 Organization Typology

- Structure (old, new) and Tasks (routine, non-routine)
- **Established** (e.g., fire department)
- **Expanding** (e.g., Red Cross)
- **Extending** (e.g., church groups)
- **Emergent** (new structure and tasks – especially volunteer-based)

Research Questions

- What were the major types of citizen response groups that emerged following Hurricane/Superstorm Sandy? Why/How did they emerge?
- How did the emergent groups communicate and coordinate with the affected communities?
- Whether and how did emergent groups collaborate with other extending and emergent groups?

Research Questions

- In the communities where emergent groups were involved, how did the demographic/socioeconomic differences manifest themselves in acute need for assistance and the supply of those services?

Additional Research Questions

- How did emergent groups use different types of media, including face-to-face, social media, radio, television, cell phones to communicate and coordinate within and across emergent and extending groups

Follow-up Research Questions

- What were the differences in the type of aid received (cleanup, food, water, shelter, power, fuel) from emergent groups in different phases of disaster response?
- What is the role of these groups in different phases (emergency, recovery, and sustainability/preparedness) of disaster response?

Methods

- Mixed-methods
- Qualitative case study
- Quantitative analysis of field data

Data Sources

- Interviews
- Snowball sampling
- Internet (websites, blogs, discussion forums, Twitter, Facebook)

Preliminary Results

Various Groups Identified (examples)

- Churches, civic groups (extending)
- Occupy Sandy Relief (emergent/hybrid)
- People's Relief
- Red Hook Initiative

Areas of Interviews

- Rockaways
- Brooklyn
- Coney Island
- New Jersey

Preliminary Results

- Social media acted as magnifier for communication and capabilities of both extending and emerging groups
- Both seemed able to absorb far greater numbers of individual volunteers than would be usual
- Possible model for future citizens organization resilience— for both prep and response

Citizen Organization Potential

Photos by Terry O'Sullivan (2012)



Individual volunteers



Extending groups



Hybrid Emergent and Extending groups



Citizen Organization Potential



Before

(520 Clinton St. Brooklyn Church 2-3 days or so after storm)

Photo by Lev Tobias (2012)
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Citizen
Organizational
Potential

After
(520 Clinton St.
Church 2 weeks or
so after storm: A
functioning
warehouse distro
center)

Photo by Lev Tobias (2012)
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Future Research: “Rest of the Story”

- Assess importance of *early* vs. *later* volunteer efforts for resilience
- Better integration of communication among volunteer and established (govt) and expanding (Red Cross)
- Recovery and contribution of volunteer emergent groups for *future* disaster resilience

Future Research: “Rest of the Story”

- Survey with Citizens
- Focus groups, interviews
 - Group leaders
 - Individual volunteers
 - Community members
- Potential research collaborations

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